

A Day in the Life of ...

Peter Mittwede

Age: 29

Timeline: M4 (7th year MD/PhD student)

Medical Interest: Orthopaedic Surgery



Academic and Clinical Background:

About halfway through my undergraduate career at a small liberal arts school (Belhaven University), I decided to pursue medical school. I majored in Sports Medicine, but pursued research opportunities in the Department of Biology, which I thoroughly enjoyed. This led me to consider MD/PhD programs, and I was fortunate enough to have a fantastic one nearby at the University of Mississippi Medical Center. I completed three years of medical school prior to joining the laboratory of Dr. Robert Hester in the Department of Physiology for the completion of my PhD. It was a blessing to be able to find a laboratory that was studying orthopaedic trauma, which I have an interest in pursuing as a clinical career. I recently defended my doctoral dissertation and am returning back to the clinic for a final year of medical school. My goal is to practice as a surgeon-scientist at an academic medical center, and to be actively involved with clinical practice, translational research, and service.

Personal and Professional Development:

Younger students often ask me if I would pursue the MD/PhD program again if I could start from scratch. My answer is always a resounding “yes!” These past 6 years have been the best in my life. They have not come without a fair number of challenges, but the trials I faced have undoubtedly made me a better-rounded, more optimistic, harder-working, more mature individual. No career is easy, but I can honestly say that the rewards that accompany the physician-scientist training path certainly outweigh the difficulties for me. I always strongly encourage younger trainees to be involved with leadership and service activities as much as possible because these are the activities that will help keep you grounded and sane when you’re feeling overwhelmed, disappointed, or frustrated. Importantly, always find time in your schedule to sleep adequately and to exercise. If you do these things, everything else in life will be more enjoyable.

A typical work day:

First and second year of medical school:

This will vary greatly depending on if you are someone who enjoys attending class and if your school has a mandatory class attendance policy. I found that I learned best outside of class, so I attended very few non-mandatory classes. Our classes were all recorded, so I found that I could listen to the lectures at 1.5x – 2x speed in the comfort of my home or in the coffee shop. But typically I spent anywhere from 4-12 hours per day studying for my courses, with the amount depending on if I had tests coming up.

Graduate school:

My schedule during graduate school depended a lot on what I had going on that week. At times, I would be extremely busy with experiments, while other weeks I would be writing a grant or paper, or traveling to a meeting. But if I had to give a general timeline, this would be it:

7am – Wake up

8am – Arrive at lab, answer e-mails, etc.

9am – Do experiments, write, read

12am – Eat lunch/attend seminar/attend meeting

1-5pm – Do experiments, write, read

5-6pm – Work out and run

6-7:30pm – Eat dinner

7:30 – 11:30pm – Write, read, answer e-mails, hang out with wife and/or friends (depends on how much I have to do).

11:30pm – Go to bed

The key during graduate school is to not waste too much time. You can absolutely sleep 8 hours a night and still have plenty of time to exercise and be a normal, social person if you use your time wisely. I don't watch a lot of TV and I take advantage of down-time throughout the day and evening, so this allowed me to still have a great and flexible life during the PhD years.

Third and fourth year of medical school:

Your schedule during the clinical period of your medical school will be highly variable depending on what rotation you're on. If I was on one of the busier rotations (internal medicine, surgery, OB/GYN), I was at the hospital anywhere from 4-6:30am and stayed until 5-7pm. Weekends were easier, but I was probably working 60-90 hours per week on these rotations, and then studying for the shelf exams when I had time. If I was on a relatively easy rotation (pediatrics, psychiatry, family medicine, electives), I arrived between 8-9am and left by 5pm, and worked between 40-60 hours per week. If you enjoy seeing patients and spending time in the clinical setting, these years are a blast.